

Greg might return

AFP, New Delhi



India's cricket chiefs on Friday dismissed media speculation that Greg Chappell would be persuaded to stay on as coach despite the World Cup debacle, saying the Australian's tenure was over.

"Greg Chappell is no more the coach," Niranjan Shah, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), told reporters midway during the two-day review of the team's performance.

"But he could be associated with Indian cricket in future as a consultant to groom youngsters," he said.

Chappell had told the BCCI on Wednesday that he did not want to extend his two-year stint as coach which ended with the World Cup, citing "family and personal rea-

sons."

However, media reports on Friday suggested that the BCCI might persuade the former Australian captain to change his mind if they were convinced he was not at fault.

"Chappell gave a detailed presentation of what went wrong at the World Cup," said Shah. "He felt he too was partly responsible for the team's failure."

"Chappell also did not make any reference to individual players but felt India needed to groom young players and asked the team to concentrate on fitness."

Shah said BCCI president Sharad Pawar praised Chappell's "professional approach" as coach.

Chappell's decision to leave came amid speculation of a rift with senior players, prompting superstar Sachin Tendulkar to go on record that he would be "hurt if the coach questioned his commitment."

The review began with Chappell, captain Rahul Dravid and team manager Sanjay Jagdale appraising BCCI chief Sharad Pawar and other officials on why India were eliminated in the first round.

The 1983 champions and finalists in 2003 were stunned by Bangladesh in their first match and then lost to Sri Lanka to bow out of the tournament in the preliminary stage.

Jagdale said the entire team had to shoulder the blame for the defeat because it did not play well," said Shah. "He too felt younger players should be encouraged."

Dravid also accepted responsibility for the early World Cup exit, said Shah.

"Dravid felt the team had left for the World Cup with high hopes but failed to perform well," the BCCI secretary said.

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Abahani climb up

Ctg MSC going great guns



CU CORRESPONDENT

The forward line finally delivered the goods as Abahani climbed to the top of the B. League table alongside Sheikh Russel with second half strikes from Hector Caporale and Awudu Ibrahim in a 2-0 away win over Chittagong Abahani here yesterday.

The Dhaka giants, yet to concede a goal in five matches, had scored only twice before their first trip to Chittagong with the goals coming from defensive midfielder Joy and centre-back Nazrul in identical 1-0 wins in their previous matches.

However, the sky-blues' Argentine coach Diego Cruciani was a relieved man after both his foreign strikers broke the duck to inspire their third win.

Abahani raised their tally to 11 points at the start of the sixth week,

level with Russel but behind on goal difference. Russel will play their sixth game this week when they face Dhaka rivals Brothers Union.

The local side handcuffed their mighty rivals from the capital in the first half enjoying familiar conditions, a hard ground at the MA Aziz Stadium, which needs regular maintenance and proper care for quality football.

The tourists took time to settle although they had an early chance when Ghanaian attacker Ibrahim, who missed the last match due to a muscle strain, set Emily inside the box. But the out-of-form national striker's effort was foiled by Chittagong goalkeeper Kamal in the fifth minute.

Chittagong Abahani, who fielded a foreigner for the first time, hardly produced any chance in another lacklustre performance that kept them at second-from bottom with three points.

However, the hosts could have had a penalty five minutes before the breather. Liberian debutant Abraham Bobby fell inside the box after a hard tackle by Dhaka Abahani's Argentine centre-back Caporale but referee Ramkrishna

Ghosh ignored the appeal from the players and a moderate home crowd.

Argentine striker Parodi finally relieved the visiting tent when he broke the deadlock on the hour with a tremendous drive inside from the box after being set up by Ibrahim.

Fifteen minutes later, Ibrahim frustrated the local crowd with a superb solo when he dodged past three defenders from the right flank before putting an angled shot into the far corner.

"We have the ability but could not prove it on the field. People could not identify Abahani as the team they used to know due to lack of scoring. I am happy that my forwards have finally scored," said Cruciani after the match.

"We have efficient players and I hope they will improve more," he added.

TEAMATES

Abahani: Biplob, Siraj, Nazrul, Caporale, Waly, Joy, Ujjal, Abul, Ibrahim (Zahid Parvez), Parodi (Pranotosh) and Emily (Tipu).

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PHOTO STAR
Dhaka Abahani and Chittagong Abahani players looking for possession during their B. League clash at the MA Aziz Stadium yesterday.

Media weighing heavy

AFP, Mumbai

India's disgruntled cricket millions faced conflicting media reports Friday as top officials searching for a new coach launched a closed-door review of the World Cup debacle.

As the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) made it clear no announcements will be made before the meetings end on Saturday evening, a media frenzy showed no signs of abating.

From outgoing coach Greg Chappell being asked to reconsider his decision to quit, to Rahul Dravid standing down as captain and former great Sunil Gavaskar taking over as manager, rumour and speculation continued.

"It is so difficult to wait till Saturday evening? Such reports do not make our job easier."

Numerous broadcast vans from television news channels and hordes of print and TV journalists jammed the entrance of the BCCI offices at the Wankhede stadium where the meetings are taking place.

The review began with Chappell, Dravid and team manager Sanjay Jagdale appraising BCCI chief Sharad Pawar and other officials on what went wrong at the World Cup where India were eliminated in the first round.

The 1983 champions and finalists in 2003 were stunned by Bangladesh in their first match and then lost to Sri Lanka to bow out of the tournament in the preliminary stage.

The BCCI will also speak to

seven former national captains before its influential working committee meets on Saturday to decide the future course of action.

The ex-captains invited for the conclave are Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi, Chandra Borde, Gavaskar, Kapil Dev, Srinivas Venkataraghavan, Ravi Shastri and Krishnamachari Srikkanth.

On Wednesday, Chappell told the BCCI he did not want to extend his two-year tenure as coach which ended with the World Cup, citing "family and personal reasons."

The former Australian skipper's decision to leave came amid speculation of a rift with senior players, prompting superstar Sachin Tendulkar to go on record saying "he will be hurt if the coach questioned his commitment."

On Friday, news reports suggested that the BCCI may ask Chappell to stay on if they were convinced he was not at fault.

Dev. India's only World Cup

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PHOTO: AFP

'Five bookies were present when Bob died'

PTI, London

Former Pakistan paceman Sarfraz Nawaz, prone to making sensational statements, has now claimed that five Pakistani bookies were in Jamaica when coach Bob Woolmer was killed.

Sarfraz insisted that Woolmer's murder in a Kingston hotel on March 18 was linked to match fixing and the former player also offered his help to track the gang of bookies.

"I know five bookies made their way to the West Indies. I can help trace them. Perhaps we can even get some clues from the players," Sarfraz told "The Sun," adding "Woolmer's death is connected with the match-fixing mafia." The 59-year-old former pacer alleged that Pakistan's matches in the World Cup were rigged.

"I believe the Pakistan World Cup games were fixed. There is a dark side to cricket. The game got on top of it for a while but it has never really been stamped out," he said.

Pakistan lost to minnows Ireland to be knocked out of the tournament barely hours before Woolmer's murder.

Sarfraz also went on to describe how the murky system of match fixing worked.

"They operate through hotels, restaurants, bars and so on. They have agents who will take a bet on a

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Widow happy with detectives

AFP London

Murdered Pakistan cricket coach Bob Woolmer's wife Gill said in an interview published Friday that police investigating her husband's death were doing a "good job," and said that she wanted the inquiry brought to a "speedy conclusion."

Gill Woolmer, 58, also told The Times that any book that her husband may have been working on is not worth publishing" because of the hurt it may cause.

Woolmer was found dead in his hotel room in Kingston, Jamaica, on March 18, a day after cricketing superpower Pakistan suffered a shock defeat at the hands of minnows Ireland, knocking them out of the World Cup.

Jamaican police said Woolmer was strangled to death but have yet to identify the killers.

"Obviously I have not met Mark Shields (the officer in charge of the investigation), but he seems to be doing a good job," Gill Woolmer told the daily, speaking from her home in Cape Town.

"He is under stress and is tired and requires help because there are so many things to look into. We need to bring this to a speedy conclusion."

She also told the paper that Bob was not keeping a World Cup diary, but was planning to write a book on his time as coach of Pakistan's cricket team.

She added, however, that it is

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Spaniards reign supreme

AFP, Paris

Fredi Kanoute scored a controversial penalty as holder's Sevilla beat his former English Premiership side Spurs 2-1 in their UEFA Cup quarterfinal first leg clash on Thursday to make it a good night all round for Spain's three representatives.

Osasuna perhaps came up with the result of the night beating 1988 UEFA Cup winners Bayer Leverkusen 3-0 away while the other Spanish side Barcelona-based Espanyol will be kicking themselves despite beating Benfica 3-2 at home as they let slip a 3-0 lead.

The night's other match saw AZ Alkmaar coached by Louis van Gaal, the former manager of Espanyol's city rivals Barcelona, held 0-0 at home by Bundesliga giants Werder Bremen.

Kanoute's goal levelled the match after Republic of Ireland skipper Robbie Keane had given Spurs the ideal start by scoring inside two minutes.

"We've got a goal advantage but against Spurs at home, with the crowd behind them, it's going to be

Alexander Kerzhakov's goal for Sevilla close to half-time kept the Spanish side's hopes alive of becoming only the second side to retain the trophy -- the other being Real Madrid.

The penalty decision, though, remained the burning issue and had both Keane and England goalkeeper Paul Robinson fuming.

Robinson was astonished by the decision.

"I got both my hands on the ball," said the England goalkeeper.

"The referee said afterwards that you got your hands on the ball and then took the man out but surely that is a fair challenge."

Keane went even further.

"I thought the penalty was a disgrace," said the Republic of Ireland captain.

"To get an early goal and then get a decision like that! It left the lads devastated."

Sevilla coach Juande Ramos, whose natural attacking style has attracted many other clubs including rumours that he could replace Jose Mourinho at Chelsea should the Portuguese coach go, admitted his side faced a tough task to retain the trophy.

"We've got a goal advantage but against Spurs at home, with the crowd behind them, it's going to be

very tough game. It's a very slim advantage," conceded Ramos.

Osasuna played well above their mid-table status and scored an even earlier goal than Spurs as Javier Cuello headed home within the first minute.

Bayer -- who went down to their heaviest ever home defeat in European football -- never really recovered from that early blow, which wasn't exactly helped by one of their central defenders Juan

opting to play up front more often than trekking back to defend as he was intended.

Leverkusen coach Michael Skibbe looked shellshocked watching from the bench and had barely recovered afterwards, but at least had the honesty to admit Bayer's chances of progressing were not good.

"Our chances of going through are about one percent," was his honest appraisal.

For his Osasuna counterpart Angel Zingano it was a day-dream for as he termed it his "Davids" against "Goliaths".

"It's a great day for Osasuna," he said. "We are proud to have won 3-0 on the pitch of a big side like Leverkusen because we are only a small team."

While Skibbe may not be feeling

FA CUP RESULT

At Leverkusen, Germany
Bayer Leverkusen (GER) 0 Osasuna (ESP) 3 (Javier Cuello 1, David Lopez 71, Webo 73)

At Alkmaar, the Netherlands
AZ Alkmaar (NED) 0 Werder Bremen (GER) 0

At Barcelona, Spain
Espanyol (ESP) 3 (Tamudo 15, Nelson 32, Pandiani 57) Benfica (POR) 2 (Nuno Gomes 62, Simao 64)

At Seville, Spain
Sevilla (ESP) 2 (Kanoute 19-pen, Kerzhakov 36) Tottenham Hotspur 1 (ENG) (Kane 2)

Carlos reveals trauma

Football

AFP, Madrid

Brazilian defender Roberto Carlos, who is leaving Real Madrid after 11 years with the Spanish giants, says he was almost "destroyed" by trauma in his personal life over the past two years.

"I have had many personal problems these last two years. My agent betrayed me, I separated from my wife. That almost destroyed me, I was alone," the 34-year-old told sports daily AS on Friday.

"The football pitch was my relief. It is where I forgot everything. The problem was when the match was over, that was when I felt alone."

Carlos said this difficult period is behind him since his daughter Roberta -- one of his seven children -- has come to live with him in Madrid.

The veteran defender wants to leave the Bernabeu stadium with a bang by helping Real to the Spanish title.

"It would be very beautiful. I say that to everyone in the locker room. That way I would leave here with extra joy."

"The first year I was here we were champions but I didn't celebrate because I was with my national team, now I would celebrate until I drop."

Real Madrid are in third place in the 20-team Spanish league